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FOR THE NORTH-AMERICAN JOURNAL.

Sir,

I do not know whether my case be a very common one, or if its communication may be of much utility, yet, as a statement of it will cost me very little trouble, and will afford me some gratification, I shall place it at your disposal. —I reside in a distant county, owning a few hundred acres of land immediately about me; I am a magistrate, and on the days when the militia are trained, I wear a pair of epaulets: in short, sir, I am what would be called, in England, a country gentleman; but to prevent any mistakes, I will merely say, that I am your fellow citizen.

My wife and daughter easily persuaded me to pass two or three months in Boston, to see something of the bustle of life, and to give the latter a chance of mixing a little in fashionable society, to obtain that degree of ease, which is generally wanting in those who lead a life of seclusion. People who live in towns, acquire by friction a degree of polish, which those who live wholly in the country can seldom attain; yet, the latter are composed of materials quite as susceptible of this quality, though it is apt to be obscured under an appearance of rusticity. I was glad, too, at an opportunity of meeting with some old acquaintances, and partaking of that hospitality, which is almost proverbial. That I have not been disappointed in my expectations of pleasure, may, perhaps, be inferred from the trifling complaints I have to make in this letter; but you must not think me querulous, and dissatisfied, if I find a little fault, which, after all, may be unreasonable; I do not mean to dictate a reform, or hardly to suggest an alteration.

Soon after my arrival, we were invited to "*a Ball*," the party was brilliant and the supper expensive and elegant. When the company were summoned to the table, the procession towards it was formed with more haste than ceremony; young men were eager only for precedence, and young girls, heedlessly crowded before matrons, who were entitled to their homage. The places at supper were taken promiscuously, and, in many cases, the first should have been last and the last first. Now, sir, I do not wish to introduce that minute attention to rank and

etiquette, with all the heart burnings, mortified pretensions, and ennui, which always accompany them, where they are servilely followed; I would as soon bring back the high-heeled shoes, stiff brocades and high toupees and cushions, in which they were formerly attired. Yet, it seems to me, that a little order, a little deference to age and situation, where affectionate respect is repaid by courtesy and condescension, would add to the charm and good effects, which result from a moderate share of social gayety, in large refined assemblies.

My next topic is still more trifling. We received an invitation "*to take tea*" on a certain evening; my daughter's friends had told her, they had no doubt it was to be a dance, and she who is as fond of *getting possession of the floor* as a member of Congress, would not have compounded for six cotillons, and was dressed accordingly. It turned out to be one of those parties where the company, formed into groups, were insulated by constant circulation of ice creams, jellies, sweetmeats, fruit, wine, &c. &c. &c. which meandered about them all the evening. The next invitation was, "*to take tea and pass the evening:*" my wife and daughter said this was only a modification of the same thing, and the latter went in a costume not suited for dancing. Behold this was as much *a ball*, as if it had been so called at once; and my poor little girl was mortified at not being prepared for it. It will no doubt appear ridiculous to you, sir, that I should have felt such trifles as these; but allow me to say, without offence, that unless you are the father of a lovely interesting daughter, and an only one, you are no judge of the subject.—Why not call things by their right names, *un chat un chat*;—but even fashion must have its technical mysteries.

In former times these balls were under the direction of very efficient masters of ceremonies; but as there is no longer any ceremony, I suppose it has been found inexpedient to keep up a sinecure. These masters of ceremonies, however, answered a very good purpose. The office, though of short duration, was an arduous one, and often required more firmness, skill, and watchfulness, than many civil ones of high import. A crowd or mob of superiour people is always more unreasonable and difficult to manage, than a mob in the streets. A master of ceremonies in those

days, had to control the forwardness of youth, and counteract nature, caprice and pride, by equalising the attentions of the men and the enjoyments of the ladies, while in the dancing room, and marshalling them in something like order in the supper room. The consequence was, that if some ladies danced more than others, all who wished to dance had an opportunity. I do not make these remarks to avenge my daughter's cause: no, sir, she is one who gains by the license, she dances too well ever to be allowed to sit still, except she prefers it. But I have seen some ladies the victims of neglect in this way, who would not have been suffered to be so formerly. In these parties there must be constant exertion, on the part of the master of the ceremonies, to prevent usurpation, and to force, if necessary, those sacrifices from individuals, which are demanded for the general enjoyment. Both sexes require this control. I recollect one of the most accomplished gentlemen in this office, which any country could ever boast of, asking some ladies who were opposing themselves to the regulations of the evening, at a splendid ball, "if they thought they came there for their own amusement?" The days are passed, sir, when such a question as this could be asked, or even comprehended, but it is full of meaning; and alas! many other things have passed away also.—Another reason for having efficient masters of ceremonies would be, humanity to some of the gentlemen. A moderate plodding man, whose movements seem to have been learnt, like those of a bear, by having been taught on a heated floor; such a dancer might consult the director of the evening about a partner suited to him; for want of this, no doubt, I have seen some poor fellows who followed their skipping, flying partners in a cotillon, in a manner that recalled to mind that line of Johnson, speaking of Shakspeare, where he says,

And panting Time toil'd after him in vain.

I have seen such disproportionate couples in this way, as could only be compared to the German fable of the luckless ox, who had nearly lost his life in being yoked with Pegasus.

The next complaint is on my own account. I was invited to "*a symposiack*;" my idea of the nature of this party was very indistinct, my wife and daughter were equally

at a loss. On the appointed evening my wife, whose imagination is singularly active, and will sometimes in consequence have her timidity very ludicrously excited, proposed to me, that I should accompany them to the theatre; I saw her drift, and that she did not feel perfectly easy on the score of this party. I smiled, and told her, I was resolved to find out what it was. On entering the room, I found several individuals, distinguished for their pursuit of science and literature. The materials were good, but it went off heavily, and I found myself obliged to be on my guard against yawning. At supper I engaged in conversation with a gentleman along side of me. Thirty years ago, I went, in regular course, through the mathematicks, metaphysicks and the Classics; and obtained the usual literary degrees. I have, however, no pretensions to learning, and have, for many years, attended more to its results, than its forms. Having made some remark to my neighbour, who, though a metaphysician, was a very pleasant man; he began in the Socratick form, and having had the simplicity to answer his questions, I found, before I was aware of it, that he had treacherously caught me in a net, where I was too much enthralled to extricate myself. In this situation, a strange pedant, opposite, pelted me with a shower of hard words, every one of which left a contusion. I made my escape as soon as I could, and on getting home, the moment I entered the room, my daughter sprang to meet me, "well, dear Father, what kind of a party was it?" My wife bid her not be so impatient, and, in the same breath, said, "come, what was this party?"—I told my child to get the dictionary. "The Dictionary! well we never thought of that, but I don't believe there is any such word in the *English Dictionary*."—She read me the explanation, "*Symposiack, relating to merry naking*!"—I told them the story, and resolved never to go to another.



FOR THE NORTH-AMERICAN JOURNAL.

The Augustan Age of Italian Literature.

THE unsettled state of language, which succeeded the dissolution of the Roman empire, was probably one of the